

of a cold and wicked world. They drift into idleness and vice. The Judgment day alone can tell the consequences of so small a thing as getting a foot wet.

I. THE QUESTION ANSWERED.

1. The possibility of sin arises from the freedom of the human will, and the finiteness of the human intellect. We cannot conceive of a moral being without absolute freedom. God has the power to make or not make moral beings; but, let it be said reverentially, he had not the power to make an infinite creature or a moral being without freedom. These are self-contradictory.

(1.) Man's liability to sin lies in his finite intellect. So long as he has not infinite insight and foresight he is liable to err in thought, and error in thought leads to error in feeling, error in feeling leads to error in action. So that we may say a creature—any creature—is peaceable. Such are not only liable to err but if they depend upon their own wisdom for guidance they are certain to err.

2. God by his very nature will do all he can consistent with the nature of rational and moral beings to prevent sin. In other words, he will do all that is necessary to put the attainment and confirmation of moral character within the reach of man.

3. If he cannot make an infinite creature, can he not in some way put the use of infinite wisdom within his reach? And if he can and does not do so will this not make him responsible for sin?

(1.) He has created man with the capacity of faith. By this he can believe the word, trust in the person, and follow the instruction of those who are superior to himself—even of the infinite.

(2.) God has not only created man with the capacity of faith; but he has condescended to offer him the guidance of his own infinite wisdom. He gave man a law to guide and restrain him by which he could have both attained and confirmed moral character.

4. Now so long as the hand of the Infallible Guide was seen and followed there was no danger. From this it follows that the law must be such that the Divine hand not only may but

must be clearly and surely seen.

(1.) Now it must not be an abstract, so called moral, law such as love God and love man; or any law which might be inferred by the human mind or the fitness of which may be seen; for in such case he may be in doubt whether he is following the guidance of his own or the Divine wisdom.

(2.) It is more fit that it be a concrete positive institution—a command of some outward act to be performed—one that would not only exercise thought, but a distinct volition and a distinct act, one—that could not be done by accident or involuntarily.

(3.) It is still more fit that the act commanded be—as we would call it—an arbitrary one; one that to the human reason may seem trivial; one that if obeyed at all would be obeyed solely out of respect to the command of God.

(4.) And it is still more fit that the command be a prohibition.

(a.) For if it be the prohibition of an outward act, it cannot be done involuntarily or by accident. It can only be done by a distinct determination of the will.

(b.) And such an act cannot be performed without intelligence, so that both obedience and disobedience would be clear to consciousness.

5. How well does the first law given to man fulfill these conditions?

(1.) It was positive not an abstract moral law.

(2.) It was apparently arbitrary. Human reason would not have inferred it, and could not see its fitness after it was proposed. Indeed natural reason seems to have been against it. The fruit was "good for food," "pleasant to the eyes," and "desired to make one wise." Why should not one eat it? There was one and only one clear reason for not eating of it, that was the known command of God.

(3.) It was a prohibition. Something easily done. Man's necessities and comforts were all supplied. He had no need of anything. It was such that he could know that it was obeyed. He was exposed to no danger. He could not disobey ignorantly involuntarily or by accident. He could disobey only by an intelligent conscious, deliberate act of his own.

6. The act then was not a trifling

one. The law was devised by infinite wisdom, and issued infinite love.

(1.) God hereby put the attainment and confirmation of moral character within the reach of man; and he did so in such a way as to clear himself of all complicity in man's sin. He not only put character within man's reach, but he gave it to him in such a way that he must have it unless by a deliberate act of his own hand he flung it away.

Thus we see it is false even to say that God permitted sin. A man does not permit what he does all he can to prevent. God suffered sin having done all he could to make it impossible but by the deliberate determination of the creature. Hence the creature, and not the Creator, is responsible for sin and all its consequences.

PRACTICAL CONCLUSIONS.

1. Is this our test?

(1.) Yes and no. We cannot start where Adam and Eve started.

(a.) They were "good," "very good." There was nothing in themselves to necessitate sin. They had no bias or inclination to sin; if they had any bias it was for good.

(b.) Their life was very simple and natural.

(c.) Their environment was good. It was the best possible.

(d.) Their intellects were unclouded by sin, and their wills unfettered by evil habits.

(2.) We start at a disadvantage.

(a.) Our intellect blinded, will weakened, and character perverted by sin.

(b.) Our life is very complex and often a labyrinth of confusion.

(c.) We start with a bias for sin and when we first awake to a consciousness of our moral state it is that we are sinners.

(d.) Besides our environment is one of sin. We are born and reared in an atmosphere of deception.

(3.) Yet, there is a sense in which their test is ours. Two possible courses were before them.

(a.) One that they knew to be of God and therefore right.

(b.) And one that they knew not to be of God and therefore wrong, or one at least that they did not know to be of God and therefore doubtful and wrong. That is there were before them a sure and a doubtful course.